

San Diego Gets First Look At Digital Future

Multiple service providers converge on coastal community with new data, voice offerings

By Peter Lambert

If a communications company were to target just one U.S. city for advanced services, it would be hard to find more fertile ground than San Diego in 1997.

According to New York-based Scarborough Research, San Diego leads the nation in modern use and ranks fourth nationally in personal computer ownership.

Research would find even higher PC and modem usage in areas just north of San Diego, says Jim Fellhauer, president of Time Warner Cable's San Diego division, doing business there as Southwestern Cable TV. The region has gained the moniker "Telecom Valley" among communications manufacturers, such as General Instrument Corp., Qualcomm Inc. and Science Applications International Corp.

As an indication of residents' hunger to be wired, Southwestern claims as paying customers 81 percent of the 210,000 homes it passes, and Cox Communications Inc. claims about 73 percent of the 555,000 homes it passes, both well above the national penetration average of 63 percent. Cox and Time Warner say their service areas include 50,000 America Online Inc. subscribers each.

"San Diego is becoming known as Futureville," says Bill Geppert, vice president and general manager at Cox of San Diego.

From the customer end, a business or consumer looking to set up shop in a market with advanced communications infrastructures could fare well in San Diego, with half a dozen competitive access providers, or CAPs; seven wireless communications providers, including Pacific Bell; San Diego's two primary cable companies — each 80 percent rebuilt for two-way services — plus PacBell's as yet unused Hybrid Fiber-Coax, or HFC network.

The city could be a national model for local competition based on state-of-the-art networks.

FULL-SERVICE STIRRINGS

Thanks to the burgeoning carrier competition, San Diego has begun to see the launch of high-speed data and digital wireless services before most of the rest of the world.

At the network construction level, the pump is well-primed.

Over the past four years, Cox says it has spent \$300 million, and Southwestern Cable TV \$120 million, on two-way rebuilds of their HFC networks, which are 80 percent to 85 percent complete now with 100 per-

cent targeted by summer. The networks deliver fiber to an average 500-home neighborhood, meaning few customers sharing 750 megahertz of bandwidth.

Consequently, the majority of Cox's 475,000 subscribers and Time Warner's 180,000 subscribers are plugged into fully activated, two-way networks that can afford hundreds of digital channels for data, video and voice services.

PacBell could become a cable overbuilder in the area. Over the past two years, it has passed tens of thousands of homes in the area, mostly on Time Warner's turf, with its own 750-MHz network. That network, like the HFC network in San Jose, may lie dormant until SBC Communications Inc. completes its acquisition of PacBell, perhaps by next month, and the new company's strategy is ironed out.

or personal communications services, leading the field of at least seven wireless digital players eyeing the market.

One month after PacBell's PCS debut, Cox launched a competing service through its majority interest in Sprint PCS in southern California. Declining to reveal numbers, Cox says it's selling the service 30 percent ahead of projections.

Rather than launch its own PCS business, Time Warner is negotiating to offer HFC transport and micro-cell placement to other PCS licensees.

By summer, PacBell expects to add more than voice and simple messaging to the PCS services package, starting with Nokia Corp.'s \$2,000 Nokia 9000 Communicator, a mobile e-mail, Internet access, phone,

launch PacBell still offers a \$50 rebate on a \$149 phone. And through Feb. 14, Cox's Sprint PCS offered no monthly charge for life to pioneer adopters.

Digital wireline telephony also is on the way. By year's end, Cox says it will roll out wireline voice over its cable networks. And Southwestern Cable's sister company, Time Warner AxS of California LP, is preparing to offer switched services to businesses this spring, as well as testing residential phone technology from Motorola Inc., Northern

Telecom Inc. and Tellabs.

Residents also will see digital cable television before much of the rest of the nation. Cox is in line for digital broadcast TV terminals for the rollout of 100-plus-channel Headend in the Sky digital video service in the third quarter.

At the same time, Fellhauer says, Southwestern Cable TV is lobbying its parent to be among the first users of Time Warner's Pegasus two-way digital TV terminal in late 1997 or early 1998.

Given that kind of competitive pressure, observers predict PacBell must expand its own HFC network there or return to the negotiating table to purchase licenses for digital wireless cable, also known as Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service, or MMDS, in San Diego and San Francisco. Just north of San Diego, in Los Angeles and Orange County, PacBell is set to launch 150-channel MMDS in April.

NET ACCESS LEADS WAY

On the heels of last fall's PCS launches come multiple data service offerings this winter and spring.

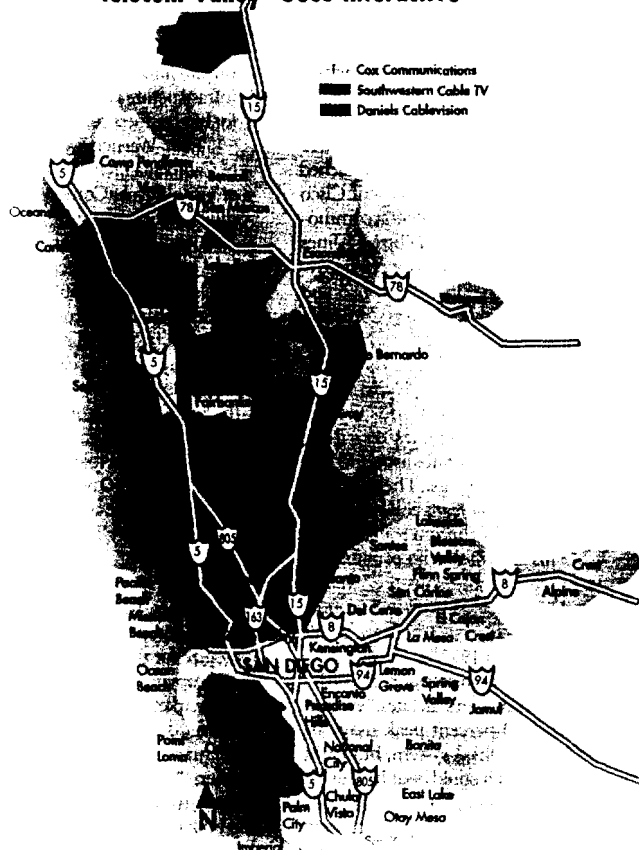
With \$25-per-month Integrated Services Digital Network, or ISDN, service already available from PacBell, tens of thousands of San Diego consumers could also gain access to 10-megabit-per-second cable modems, at about \$45 per month, by year's end.

Hundreds of businesses looking for price and feature competition in data services are being courted by five CAPs and PacBell.

On Feb. 6, Time Warner's Southwestern Cable TV launched its RoadRunner cable online service to about 150,000 homes equipped for two-way service.

In the next 90 days, Cox is scheduled to launch the @Home cable online service, in which Cox is an equity partner, to more than 400,000 ►

'Telecom Valley' Goes Interactive



Also under way in Futureville: development of a wireless digital data infrastructure.

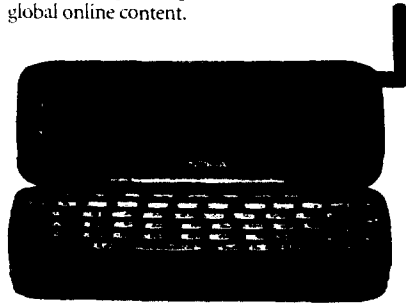
In November 1996, Pacific Bell Mobile Services launched Mobile PCS.

fax and organizer device. PacBell also is developing a telephone number-Internet address interface for crossover delivery of e-mail via PCS.

Indicative of multiservice price wars to come, three months after

▼ two-way-enabled homes.

Cox, Time Warner and PacBell all will operate as Internet service providers, or ISPs, as well as passive data service carriers. @Home, RoadRunner and Pacific Bell At Hand all are many months into the process of developing packages of local and global online content.



All-in-one: phone, e-mail, fax, Net surfing

In July 1995, PacBell launched wholly-owned but independent subsidiary PacBell Internet Services and two months later offered dedicated Internet access to large businesses. In May 1996, it launched dial-up analog access for consumers and small businesses. The carrier counts more than 100,000 ISDN customers statewide, though it makes no regional figures available.

PacBell also could enter the high-speed race in San Diego.

This month, the carrier is expanding its high-speed Digital Subscriber Line, or xDSL, beta trial from about 11 users in San Ramon to 100 or so in San Ramon, Danville and Palo Alto, Calif. It will add remote local area network, or LAN, access to the current Internet access for the next phase of the trial.

By fall, PacBell projects limited commercial rollouts of Asynchronous Transfer Mode, or ATM, xDSL with expanded deployments statewide in 1998, though it won't yet declare San Diego among the early targets.

PacBell also could use its dormant HFC plant in San Diego to roll out its own cable modems.

"We're not blind," says Time Warner's Fellhauer. "We've seen PacBell build HFC in our service area. They're still fumbling with it, but it's there for some reason. We take it seriously, and we're prepared."

FIGHT OR SWITCH

"If people are reluctant to switch providers when they're happy, my job is to do everything to make them too happy to leave," Fellhauer says.

Mario Vecchi, chief technology officer for Excalibur Group, the Time Inc.-Time Warner Cable joint venture behind RoadRunner, says cable modems will keep customers extraordinarily happy by avoiding busy signals. Vecchi says RoadRunner will

avoid the kind of catastrophic performance problems faced by AOL in recent months, in great part because of its "connectionless" architecture. At \$44.95 a month, RoadRunner users will virtually always be logged on to the service.

"AOL's big problem is that every user must set up a physical connection every time he logs on, and the clock is ticking, so he logs off when he's not moving data. We, on the other hand, are connectionless, like a LAN, and everyone stays logged on all the time. In a few years, people will realize that that is an even greater advantage for us than speed," Vecchi says.

In San Diego, both Time Warner and Cox use Motorola Multimedia cable modems designed to deliver

data at 10 Mbps into the home and 784 kilobits per second out of the home, and to serve up to five e-mail accounts each.

Time Warner uses proxy, e-mail and management servers from Sun Microsystems Inc. and content fetch software, ATM switches and integration services from Toshiba America Information Systems Inc. The system's network monitoring and management are based on Hewlett-Packard Co.'s HP OpenView system.

The Time Warner headend features half a dozen Sun PROXY Ultrasparc servers for local and cached global content, as well as e-mail. Cisco Systems Inc.'s 7500 routers accommodate up to seven 1.5-Mbps T1 lines and frame relay circuits for connectivity to the Internet, local enterprises and the MCI Communications Corp. network operations center.

From the headend, 155-Mbps Synchronous Optical Network, or SONET, multiplexers and Toshiba AX-1500 ATM switches distribute RoadRunner to 11 hubs around Time Warner's fiber rings. There are 18 hubs planned by year's end, each with a Motorola distribution router.

"This is a who's who of information hardware and software," Vecchi says. The starter platform will support 15,000 subscribers, "which we think we'll achieve in 1997."

However, each component can be scaled up as demand dictates. "We had projected 30 percent peak usage in our Akron [Ohio] system, but early results suggest it could be as high as 60 percent," he says.

In addition to keeping Excalibur prepared to meet sudden leaps in demand, "50 or 60 percent simultaneous usage opens major possibilities for advertising and other revenue opportunities with 'push' technology," he says.

Time Warner has pledged a modem to 110 public and private

schools and is negotiating to install fiber to the University of California San Diego campus, a customer ripe for fast data with its microelectronics and biotechnology research, Fellhauer says.

"The gating factor early on will be our ability to install quickly," he says. Teams of cable and PC installers are taking two to three hours to do the job well. Toshiba provides the PC expert to each team.

CUSTOMER FLOOD

In terms of customer support, Southwestern Cable will provide the first two help-desk tiers, first for questions that can be solved at the network level and second for basic computer hardware and software solutions. MCI provides third-tier support.

"We've got a sophisticated labor pool here, and they're all getting extensive training from Motorola, Toshiba and us," Fellhauer says.

Flooded with calls from word-of-mouth publicity, Time Warner postponed the early February launch of infomercials and spots promoting

own Visa credit card.

While Sprint PCS by Cox is available across the whole network, on some parts of its plant Cox has PCS, high-speed data and analog video operating together — "a first, we think, anywhere," says Vice President and General Manager Bill Geppert.

In early February, a handful of Cox employees were online for alpha tests of @Home. The waiting list for the service stood at 1,800 customers. Like Southwestern, Cox's headend features state-of-the-art server, router and distribution systems.

No matter what the new service, Cox believes "there needs to be both a value enhancement and a tie to the older core services," says Art Reynolds, vice president of new product development. "With Sprint PCS by Cox, for example, you get an added value if you're a Cox cable customer of simplified pricing."

In that respect, the groundwork is already being laid with consumers to position Cox's brand as a single stop

The Business Of Business

Although the marketing emphasis for San Diego's cable operators is on advanced residential services, infrastructure is in place to compete for big-business customers.

Time Warner AxS of California LP, a unit of Time Warner Communications, shares a 2,000-mile regional fiber ring with Southwestern Cable TV, passing 1,500 businesses with Synchronous Optical Network, or SONET, transport. The company filed tariffs for digital cross-connect and switched services, the last of which it intends to launch in the third quarter.

AxS will complete testing of its central office this month and is positioned to operate as a facilities-based local carrier over Time Warner's res-

idential network, should parent Time Warner give the OK on wireline telephone entry.

"I'm doing a lot of business with Internet service providers, and everyday I sell T1s to people who want to connect to the Internet," says AxS General Manager Terry Churchill.

"We also mention to our customers, 'Hey, our sister company has RoadRunner [cable modem service], and you could access your enterprise and the Internet via RoadRunner, or I could hook up a high-speed connection for the enterprise and interface it with the cable plant, and you could employ whatever tunneling, or other security features you want,'"

for communications services.

"We believe the consumer needs someone to help him navigate through all the new high technology," Geppert says. "We're the company you call to come out and service all your in-home communications needs."

To put customer-friendly flesh on last year's \$1 million in advertising, Cox of San Diego offers two-hour service-call windows and on-time guarantees, and has broadened staff expertise.

For data services, @Home is developing a certification program for technicians and will provide second- and third-tier help-desk support. Cox will supply both PC and cable installation staff. ▲



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- DO NOT USE AVAILABLE ELECTRONIC SYSTEM FOR PREORDERING FUNCTIONS SUCH AS NUMBER ASSIGNMENT
- DO NOT USE AVAILABLE ELECTRONIC SYSTEM TO REPORT AND TRACK TROUBLE REPORT
- DO NOT USE CODES THAT PERMIT LISTING INFORMATION TO FLOW DIRECTLY TO THE LISTINGS DATABASE
- DO NOT USE "AS IS" SHORT CUT FOR COMPLICATED HUNTING ORDERS



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